



## Tilburg University

### ‘Bättre folk’

Westinen, E.E.

*Publication date:*  
2011

*Document Version*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Westinen, E. E. (2011). ‘Bättre folk’: *Critical Sociolinguistic Commentary in Finnish Rap Music*. (Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies; No. 16).

#### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

#### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



# Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies

## Paper 16

### **‘Bättre folk’ – Critical Sociolinguistic Commentary in Finnish Rap Music**

by

*Elina Westinen (University of Jyväskylä)*

December 2011

# **‘Bättre folk’ – Critical Sociolinguistic Commentary in Finnish Rap Music**

Elina Westinen

## **Description**

Westinen, Elina, MA, is a doctoral student in the *Center of Excellence for the Study of Variation, Contacts and Change in English* (VARIENG), funded by the Academy of Finland (2006-2011) and in the *Languages and Discourses in Social Media* research team which is part of the *Max Planck Working Group on Sociolinguistics and Superdiversity*. In her ongoing PhD study, she is exploring the construction of polycentric authenticity in Finnish hip hop culture through linguistic and discursive repertoires on several scale-levels. Her research relates to the following research areas: sociolinguistics, discourse studies, multilingualism and hip hop research.

## **Summary**

This paper discusses the ways in which rap music makes use of a range of resources to construct a critical sociolinguistic commentary. The specific case it focuses on is Finnish rap which takes issue with the official, but often tension-ridden Finnish-Swedish bilingualism in Finland. It shows how the resources used in this kind of rap are simultaneously discursive and linguistic and how they operate on several scale-levels, i.e. socio-temporal frames (Blommaert 2010), such as global, translocal and local. The findings of this paper will contribute to our understanding of (trans)local hip hop cultures and, more specifically, of the versatile nature of Finnish rap music. In my analysis, I will look into the ways in which a local rapper creates a sociolinguistic critique by making use of both discursive and linguistic resources. As data, I am using the lyrics of a rap song entitled ‘Bättre folk’ by *Pyhimys*. This example shows how rap can function as a form of language political and sociolinguistic critique: through his content and stylistic choices, the rapper carefully constructs his take on the traditional polarization of Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking Finns and on how the Finnish majority should relate to the Swedish-speaking minority.

**Key words:** Finnish hip hop culture, rap lyrics, sociolinguistics, scales, resources.

## **1. Introduction: ”This is not for a better folk, this is just a folk of better quality”**

Opinions about Swedish language in Finland are extremely polarized – it is both loved and hated. And so are the allegedly better-off Swedish-speaking Finns, ‘bättre folk’ (‘better folk’). Although, according to the Constitution of Finland (Constitution of Finland 17. §), both Finnish and Swedish are the two official national languages, and the rights of the Swedish-speaking Finns are, thus, protected by the law, the reality is often entirely different. Recently, public debates about the status of Swedish and the so-called ‘forced’ Swedish have taken place in the media and in everyday discussions. The term ‘forced Swedish’ is often used to refer to the fact that at school, it is compulsory for Finnish-speaking Finns to study Swedish (and, of course, for Swedish-speakers to study Finnish.). At one end of the discussion, Swedish-speaking Finns are concerned about their status and demand service from authorities in their

mother tongue in public agencies and offices. At the other end, there are some Finnish-speaking Finns who see the official bilingualism and Swedish language as a burden of the past. Attitudes against Swedish-speaking Finns and Swedish language are nowadays more and more hostile, and even threatening, particularly on some internet discussion fora. (Grönlund 2011: 7.) Also some political parties (e.g. Perussuomalaiset ('True Finns') 2011, Svenska folkpartiet ('Swedish People's Party') 2011) and individual politicians have expressed their opinions, both for and against, on the 'forced' Swedish. A song called 'Bättre folk' by a rap artist *Pyhimys* ('Saint') can also be seen as a kind of a political statement. The lyrics can even be explored from the point of view of language politics because the narrator of the song, Robban, demands the equality of people and of languages and encourages us to forget the past. It is in the view of this particular background that I will analyze these lyrics in this article.

The aim of this article is to explore the ways in which Finnish hip hop culture, particularly rap music, makes use of a range of resources in order to construct a sociolinguistic commentary about the sociocultural and -historical context of Finland. The resources used are simultaneously discursive and linguistic. The discursive resources refer to what is said, that is, to narratives, discourses, topics, speech act patterns and cultural references (Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2002) and linguistic resources (Blommaert 2010) relate to how something is said, that is, to language varieties, dialects and slang. All of these resources operate on several scale-levels (Blommaert 2010), so-called spatio-temporal frames. The notion of scale encompasses not only the spatial and social scopes but also the temporal durability (Blommaert & Rampton forthcoming). The concept of scale can, thus, be used to analyze the layered and multi-scalar nature of any given context, instead of the simplified local-global dichotomy. The scales can be, for example, global, national, regional and local. The findings of this article will contribute to our understanding of the translocal hip hop cultures and, in particular, the multifaceted nature of Finnish rap music. My main focus is to show how the sociocultural and -historical reality of Finland is constructed. More specifically, I wish to explore how a local rap artist, *Pyhimys*, constructs a sociolinguistic critique in 'Bättre folk' by making use of several different discursive and linguistic resources. With this example and by focusing on what is being said and how it is said in it – we can see how a rap artist carefully constructs his critique about the traditional juxtaposition between the Swedish-speaking Finns and Finnish-speaking Finns as well as his take on how the majority should regard and treat the minority.

I consider rap an example of translocal youth and music cultures (see Leppänen et al. 2009a, Leppänen forthcoming) and, of course, hip hop cultures, in particular (e.g. Pennycook 2007). Across the globe, young people are actively engaged in (sub)cultures and activities that seem translocal (Leppänen et al. 2009a, Blommaert 2010) in nature. Translocality can be understood in two ways. First, it deals with the fact that today's locales are connected to one another in complex ways. The local still matters, but it tends to matter more and more in relation to other locales. Second, translocality refers to a specific understanding of culture as exogenous and outward-looking and focused on identification and hybridity. Therefore, both territoriality and de-territoriality act as reference points for identification. (Leppänen et al. 2009a: 1081-1082.) This identification often takes place through various discursive and linguistic resources. Hip hop culture is an excellent example of such translocality since the cultural phenomenon itself is very much global in nature but the context and forms of the culture are always inevitably local. As I have already shown elsewhere (Westinen 2010), Finnish rap music makes use of and modifies various linguistic resources to suit its own purposes. In this article, however, I will start the analysis from the other end of the phenomenon: how Finnish rap music also makes use of several discursive resources.

In this article I will first describe the theoretical framework of my study, sociolinguistics of globalization and its key concepts – resources and scales – as well as discuss how previous research on hip hop culture has addressed the global-local dimensions of hip hop and their impact on language and discourse. To set the scene, I will then sketch a picture of Finnish hip hop culture and rap music, and, finally, give a detailed analysis of the ways in which the piece, the lyrics of ‘Bättre folk’, constructs its sociolinguistic critique and discuss it as an example of how the translocality of rap also manifests in its interest in the local (and global) linguistic and discursive resources.

## **2. A sociolinguistics of globalization: resources and scales**

In this article, I approach hip hop culture from the perspectives provided by Jan Blommaert’s (2010) ‘sociolinguistics of globalization’ and by Alastair Pennycook’s (2007) ‘socioblinguistics’. The former framework offers me the concepts of ‘resources’ and ‘scales’ which will be described in more detail below. With the help of the latter framework I will explore and describe the global spread of hip hop and the study of languages in their context, as well as the relationship between them. Bling(bling) here refers, of course, to the stereotypically luxurious hip hop lifestyle. In addition, my study draws on discourse studies in its approach (e.g. Blommaert 2005, Johnstone 2002). Accordingly, rap lyrics are seen as both discourse and discourses. They are discourse in the sense that, like most human communication, they rely on language and the knowledge people have about language. Discourse is both the source and result of this knowledge. Rap lyrics as discourses, in turn, refer to conventional ways of speaking and thinking which are mutually constitutive and which contribute to ideologies and power in society. Discursive practices, thus, create social reality and vice versa. Through discursive practices, rap artists also construct identities and social categorization in their lyrics and, in the process, make use of earlier discourse(s) and simultaneously create new ones.

The key concepts of my research – ‘resources’ and ‘scales (Blommaert 2010)’ – help me to understand and describe the multifaceted nature of hip hop culture. According to Blommaert (2010), a sociolinguistics of globalization is a sociolinguistics of mobility where the object of interest are the actual, concrete resources that people make use of, instead of abstract language systems. These resources are never static but move in time and space (Blommaert 2010: 5). Resources refer to the actual language resources that people make use of and to which they attribute different values and degrees of usefulness, and they do this “in real sociocultural, historical and political contexts” (Hymes 1996, chapter 3 as quoted by Blommaert 2010: 5). Scales – spatio-temporal frames, levels or dimensions – are useful conceptual means with which a phenomenon like hip hop can be understood in a multi-dimensional way: in it, both local and global dimensions are always meaningful. Analogously, it is a temporally scalar phenomenon in that its roots are naturally in the past and continue to have meaning, but simultaneously it is happening right here and now. Particular forms of normativity (what is correct and what is not) and patterns of language use are organized on these vertical and layered scale levels that are organized from the strictly local to the strictly global, with all sorts of intermediate scale levels in between. Access to and control over these scales is unevenly distributed in the world. It is, thus, very much a matter of power and (in)equality. (Blommaert 2010.) For example, thanks to his/her high education, a westerner may have better access to higher scale-levels and standard language resources through higher education more likely than for a person coming from the poorer parts of the world, where the scales and resources are typically local and also stay local. Issues of power come to the fore when, for example, an interlocutor raises the discussion to a higher scale-level through a standard variety, and the other person has no way of responding to this, since s/he does not have the adequate resources in

his/her repertoire for doing so. Different scales can interact, mix and/or be in conflict with one another, because normativity plays a role in each process. (Blommaert 2010, 36-37.)

Why, then, study hip hop culture and rap lyrics in the context of globalization? This is because hip hop offers us a good example of ongoing globalization processes. Today, there is hardly a country in the world that has not been affected by some aspect of hip hop culture. Hip hop is a very global phenomenon but wherever it occurs, it always has a local form and expression. In hip hop, as well as in globalization processes, the dialogue and the interrelationship between the local and the global is very significant and visible. Many researchers (e.g. Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2002) see hip hop culture mainly as a local adaptation of a global cultural phenomenon. Further, both 'language' (or resources, to be specific) and discourse play a key role in hip hop culture, as well as in globalization. In this equation, English often is an important resource, and it is frequently modified according to the local language. Typically, using one's own mother tongue instead of, or alongside English is also a sign of localizing the culture. The object of my analysis – Finnish rap music – in this article is a case in point: by making use of several global and local resources, it represents, in its own unique way, recent sociolinguistic changes in Finland. In addition, as Finnish hip hop culture and rap music have not yet been studied extensively, at least from a sociolinguistic perspective, the present study is thus pioneering in the field of hip hop research in Finland, while contributing to the emergent international research tradition (see e.g. Pennycook 2007, Alim, Ibrahim & Pennycook 2009, Androutsopoulos 2009).

### **3. Finnish hip hop culture and rap music**

Hip hop culture consists of rap music, breakdance and graffiti. In rap music, rap artists, also known as MC's (*master of ceremonies*), rap and dj's create the music and the beats. Often, the terms rap and hip hop are used interchangeably. As regards the birth and origins of the culture, the opinions and stories vary. The most common understanding is that the roots of the culture lie in the United States, and more specifically, in the Bronx of New York, and in the African American oral culture. Some scholars, however, view that the culture was originally born in Africa (see e.g. Omoniyi 2009). Nowadays, however, hip hop culture is one of the most fascinating sites for the study of globalization, identification and self-understanding for youth around the world (Alim 2009). Rap music, in particular, with its intensive reliance on the use and transformation of language and discourse, offers young people a medium through which they can express themselves and their identities in a globally understandable and meaningful way. Through these processes, young people can learn to know themselves better and to ask significant questions: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where do I belong?

Similarly to other countries, also Finland has its own unique hip hop culture. However, to date it has not yet been studied in detail, at least in the field of language studies and sociolinguistics (but see e.g. Kalliokoski 2006, Leppänen & Pietikäinen 2010, Westinen 2007, 2010, forthcoming). Hip hop culture arrived in Finland from the United States in the 1980s. Initially, breakdance and graffiti were the most visible and popular activities of the culture but slowly, also rap music began to attract Finnish youth and some rap groups were formed. One of them was *Damn the Band* whose debut album is considered to be the first Finnish rap album (Mikkonen 2004: 50). The first wave of Finnish rap music consisted, however, mostly of humor rap (for example, *Raptori* as well as *Bat & Ryyd*). The humorous aspect of the early Finnish rap music had, at least partly, to do with the fact that the distance to the 'mother country' of hip hop, the United States, seemed quite long. Finnish and African-American culture did not seem to have much in common back then, and, therefore, many rappers of the time resorted to humor

and even parody. Ironically, also the second wave of Finnish hip hop, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, started with humorous rap music with the rapper *Petri Nygård* as its leader. Usually, however, the rap group *Fintelligens* is regarded as the true pioneers of 'proper' Finnish hip hop as they became the most successful rap act of their time, at least in the mainstream. They also took their own music-making seriously. (Mikkonen 2004.)

At the moment, rap music is the most visible and popular element of the culture, both amongst the fans and in the media. Finnish hip hop culture consists of several local 'scenes', i.e. the local places and communities of the culture, which are mainly in the urban areas, Helsinki metropolitan area being the biggest one. However, the scenes are also provincial and regional and they extend from east to west and from north to south. Also minorities, such as Sami people and Finnish sign language community, are represented in the culture. The themes in Finnish hip hop vary from authentic and autobiographical stories from one's personal life to Finnish hip hop culture, scene and 'posses' (groups). The rappers also address local and global issues, current topics and problems in their lyrics. At the moment, Finnish hip hop culture is a very vibrant and versatile ensemble. The rap scene consists of several different artists and groups who, with their different styles, represent both mainstream and underground aspects of hip hop. Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems that Finnish rap music is here to stay and it needs to be understood as one particular meaningful music genre amongst others in Finland. (Mikkonen 2004: 192.)

#### **4. Rapping the Bättre folk**

My aim in this article is to explore how rap music can function as a critical sociolinguistic commentary about a specific sociocultural and -historical situation of Finland. The primary data under investigation consist of the lyrics of 'Bättre folk' by a 29-year old rap artist Pyhimys from Helsinki, the capital of Finland. In addition, in order to shed more light onto the origins and themes of the song from the artist's point of view, I will refer to an interview I conducted with him. Pyhimys is a very experienced artist in the Finnish hip hop scene. He has released several albums and collaborated with several other Finnish rap artists. In addition, he owns his own record company, *Yellowmic*, and also works as a producer. He is part of several rap projects and groups and he raps under several aliases. In *Teflon Brothers* he raps as *Miguel Santos* and he is also part of the *Ruger Hauer* rap collective. The song examined here, *Bättre folk*, is from his album called *Medium* released in 2011. The song describes the relationship between a minority, Swedish-speaking Finns, and the majority, Finnish-speaking Finns as well as the common history between the two Nordic countries, Finland and Sweden. Robban, a young Finnish-Swedish man, is the narrator of the story. In the analysis, I aim to show how Pyhimys constructs his sociolinguistic critique. Analytically, this task entails seeking answers to the following questions: What kinds of discursive and linguistic resources are made use of in *Bättre folk*? On which scale-levels do these resources operate? First, I will analyze the contents of the lyrics by exploring what is said. On the discursive level, I am, thus, looking into the narratives, discourses, topics, speech act patterns and cultural references that are made use of. After this, I will analyze how or with which resources the contents are verbalized. On the linguistic level, then, I am focusing on what kinds of various language resources, varieties, slang and dialects the artist makes use of in this particular song.

In the analysis, I will make use of the concept of 'scale' in order to make more general, macro-level observations of the sociocultural and -historical context of the lyrics. I will explore the lyrics through a spatio-temporal lens to understand how various scale-levels work in the lyrics and what kinds of meanings and implications they create. In order to analyze the various discursive resources, such as

topics, speech act patterns and cultural references, in the lyrics, I will draw on the rap lyrics studies by Androutsopoulos & Scholz (2002, 2003) and Androutsopoulos (2009). Typical topics in rap lyrics can be, for example, self-presentation, scene discourse or social critique. Speech act patterns, or genre-typical verbal actions, refer to, for instance, boasting, dissing ('to disrespect someone') or time and place references. Cultural referencing, an old routine associated with the plays of African American youth, such as 'playing the dozens' (Morgan 2002, 58), is something contemporary rap artists make use of extensively in these verbal actions. In addition, I will analyze the data on the level of narratives and discourses and explore how a plot begins and ends, and how the main character acts in this narrative. On the level of discourses, I will take a look at the various ways of speaking and thinking related to the various themes. As for the analysis of the linguistic aspects of the lyrics, Blommaert (2010) offers suitable concepts and ideas. I will analyze the concrete linguistic resources (such as language varieties, dialects and slang – see section 2 for more detail) that the artist makes use of in his lyrics as well as their functions.

### **The sociocultural and -historical context**

Finland and Sweden are neighboring Nordic countries and Finland was part of Sweden from c. 1150 up to 1809. As a result, there still is a Swedish-speaking minority in Finland that lives mostly in the coastal area and in Helsinki metropolitan areas. Recently, heated attitudes and language ideological debates around the so-called forced Swedish have been prominent in Finnish society and the media. Partly due to historical reasons, the Swedish-speaking minority is still seen as the rich well-educated elite and, analogously, Swedish as an elite language which Finnish speakers, contrary to what the current Language Law stipulates, should not be required to learn or know. In contrast, most Finns consider the English language as a useful and important resource and use it for both domestic and international purposes on various domains (Leppänen et al. 2011). For some Finns, it may even be "the third domestic language" of Finland. The role of English is thus less controversial than that of Swedish but there is some debate on its role and functions, too. In public discussions and language policy documents (Hakulinen et al. 2009), it, too, is taken to constitute a threat to the Finnish language and its status for example in the fields of science and business.

### **Scalar narratives, topics and discourses in Bättre folk**

Narrative-wise, the story operates on local and national scale-levels. A Finnish-Swedish Robban from Helsinki is the narrator animated (Goffman 1981) by Pyhimys as the voice of the Swedish-speaking Finn. In doing this, Pyhimys makes use of the resources he has access to, the first one of which is (mainstream) education. In Finland, the basic education is accessible to everyone and its quality is relatively stable, regardless of the school or area, and, therefore, most of his audiences can be expected to share his educational background. For example, when he raps about history, he can, at least in principle, expect most of his listeners to know about it, too. The references he makes and the meanings they have, as well as the linguistic resources that he makes use of, are basically available for everyone. Likewise, standard Finnish is, more or less, available and understandable for everyone, as well as (Finnish) Swedish, which, at least for now, is part of the obligatory subjects taught at school as it is the second official language of the country. Besides this voice of 'mainstream' Finland, Pyhimys incorporates another voice in his song. This other 'voice' (Bakhtin 1981), an expression of a subjective meaning position, or 'footing' (Goffman 1981) that Pyhimys makes use of in his lyrics, is that of the subculture, that of hip hop culture, in particular. However, unlike his mainstream Finnish voice, the hip hop voice, manifest in his use of subcultural jargon and cultural references, is only meant for certain audiences: the access to these is restricted.



In terms of the topics and discourses in the song, the scale-levels are local and national, but also global. The main topic is the relationship and confrontation between the majority of Finnish-speaking Finns and the minority of Swedish-speaking Finns as well as the history between Finland and Sweden. From a temporal point of view, the topic operates on several historical and contemporary scale-levels. This can be seen for example in one specific speech act pattern – the cultural time and place reference “in 1323 Österland got its Eastern border” – that refers to a specific point in history. In that year, a peace treaty between Novgorod (nowadays Russia) and Sweden was made, and it defined the Eastern border of Sweden. Echoing this historical relationship between the two realms, the song refers to Finland as ‘Österland’, which stands for the eastern part of Sweden. The topics of the song also address the prejudice and racism aimed at the Swedish-speaking Finns. This they do – with ironic counter-discourse – by denying the commonly-held stereotypes about the Swedish-speaking Finns. In fact, the song is about resolving conflicts and forgetting the past. It argues that we are basically all the same – there is no ‘bättre folk’, better people. In this temporal sense, the discourses in the song are, in the temporal sense, both historical and contemporary. They deal with (in)justice, (in)equality, (reverse) discrimination and ‘the other’. On a global scale, however, we can see the ‘universal’ theme or topic of hip hop culture: the social critique and an attempt at defending minority rights. In this particular song, this is, however, again done ironically when Robban is defending the rights of the so-called better people by denying the stereotypes in his own life, for example in saying: “I don’t vote for SPP [Swedish People’s Party]”. Voting for this Party is one of the most (stereo)typical characteristics of being a Finland-Swede and it is one of the many things Robban wants to disengage himself from. In sum, the scales of the narrative, topics and discourses are conflicting in the sense that the contemporary age and the era of Finland under Swedish rule are set opposite to each other. Through Robban, Pyhimys voices how, in the past, there was a contradiction between Finns and Swedes, but also how, nowadays, we should simply let bygones be bygones. He emphasizes how we are all equal, and that there is no better folk. This demand for equality is local and national, but it also relates to the global themes of hip hop culture, on a more general level.

### Scalar discursive and linguistic resources in Bättre folk

Bättre folk<sup>1</sup> consists of three stanzas, a chorus and a coda. In the story, the narrator, Robban, introduces us things about himself and his life. In addition, we learn about historical and contemporary instances that deal with the majority-minority sensitivities.

1.

Bättre Folk, Bättre Folk

Tää ei oo paremmille ihmisille

tää on vaan parempaa musaa

Bättre Folk, Bättre Folk

Tää ei oo paremmille ihmisille

tää on vaan paremman laatuinen **folk**

Better folk, Better folk

This isn’t for better people

this is just better music

Better folk, Better folk,

This isn’t for better people

this is just **folk** of better quality

In the first example, the resources that Pyhimys mobilizes operate on both national and global scale-levels. Bättre folk is both the title and the theme of the song. It is a sociocultural and -historical concept and reference and very loaded as it immediately triggers connotations of the stereotypical view the majority holds of the (better-off) minority. According to Tandefelt (2000: 71), this specific image is still

<sup>1</sup> In order to indicate the origin of lexical items in the lyrics, the following symbols are used: spoken vernacular Finnish is default text, standard Swedish is underlined, English is **in bold**, Helsinki slang is in *italics* and standard Finnish is both in italics and underlined.

very familiar to most Finns, although nowadays the difference between the majority and minority is mainly that, compared to the Finnish-speaking Finns, the Swedish-speaking middle class is relatively larger. The political and cultural activities of the Swedish-speaking minority have, however, kept the image of the 'bättre folk' alive. The loadedness of the concept 'bättre folk' can also be seen in the language – in Swedish. This particular concept would simply not work the same way in Finnish, as it would not have the same kind of power, effect or connotations in Finnish. This is because the particular concept in Swedish indexes a significant historical and cultural image of the Swedish-speaking Finns. In his lyrics, Pyhimys takes the concept out of its original context and gives it a new meaning that refers to folk music, on a global scale. Thus, the word 'folk' – a Swedish word referring to 'people' – no longer refers to people on a national scale, but, rather, its meaning is to be understood in the sense that the word has in English, as folk music. What we have seen here is the process of 're-entextualization' (Silverstein & Urban 1996) whereby Pyhimys takes a discourse element from the traditional, national discourse of Finland-Swedish people and reassigns it with a new meaning, in another context, that of global hip hop. Pyhimys may thus hint that rap music, in particular, is this kind of better folk music. At the same time, both meanings of the word 'folk' are still present in the song, and, in this sense, Pyhimys thus creates 'double-voiced' discourse (Bakhtin 1981, 324). This interpretation was also confirmed by the interview in which he said: "The idea started off from the concept of Bättre folk and that the word folk would refer to music in that."

2.

Lainaa satanen,  
Jag kan inte ringa min folks, jag hatar dem  
 lukeeks mun otsassa pappa betalar  
 ku toivomus kaivost taas kolikkoja naaraan

Borrow me a hundred,  
I can't call my folks, I hate them  
 does my forehead say daddy pays  
 when I'm picking up coins from the wishing well again

In the second example, the discursive and linguistic resources Pyhimys uses operate on the local and global scale-levels. Also the subjective scale is present. The story is local, Robban's own, as he is relating how he is pressed for money and how – contrary to the stereotypical view 'pappa betalar' ('daddy pays') that some Finns have about Swedish-speakers – he simply cannot call his parents and ask for money from his father. Like 'bättre folk', also 'pappa betalar' is, in fact, one of the most recurrent sociocultural concepts that are attached to the stereotypically wealthier Finland-Swedes. The protagonist of the song, Robban, however, has to rely on other people for money, or even dig up coins from a wishing well. Thus, in doing this, Robban disengages himself from this particular stereotypical view of Swedish-speaking Finns. Again, in his interview Pyhimys confirmed this view: "The aim of Bättre folk was to present 'a small problem' that fills up a person's life, in this case, reverse discrimination. The main character [Robban] is doing worse than other people in the same minority." By this, Pyhimys means that we stereotypically assume that Swedish-speaking Finns would not normally face discrimination because they are wealthy and succeed in life. Robban, however, does not fit into this stereotypical view. On the linguistic level, we can clearly see how the Finnish-speaking Pyhimys makes use of the voice of the Other, the Swedish-speaking Robban. He does this by animating Robban with the help of a mixture of vernacular Finnish and standard Swedish. In addition, he uses an English word, 'folks', to refer to Robban's parents. This word, popular particularly amongst the youth, has the effect of raising the scale temporarily on a global level again.

3.

1323 sai Österland itärajan  
Muttei menny Jussi suosiolla taakse vajan  
ja vuosisatojen ajan  
ni var orjat, vi var borgare

in 1323 Österland got its Eastern boarder  
but Jussi didn't go behind the shed voluntarily  
and for centuries  
you were slaves, we were bourgeois

In example 3, we can see both national and 'Sweden as a Nordic superpower' time-place scales. A particularly interesting choice here is the cultural reference to Jussi, a stereotypical, resilient Finnish man who does not give up easily. Most Finns would in fact interpret 'Jussi' intertextually by associating him with the famous trilogy *Täällä Pohjantähden alla* ('Here under the Northern Star') by Väinö Linna, one of the best-known Finnish novelists. The trilogy begins with the sentence "In the beginning, there was swamp, mattock – and Jussi". The particular man in the novel series, *Jussi Koskela*, was extremely hard-working and resilient and, with time, became the epitome of the Finnish man. On the discursive level, this extract also refers to the historical situation under the rule of the Swedish Empire in which Finns were the 'slaves' of the Swedish 'bourgeoisie'. Thus, the historical image we get from this extract is that Finns are subordinate to Swedes, the ruling elite, but not without a fight. These asymmetrical roles are expressed in each people's mother tongue. In this example, we can also see Robban's viewpoint on the level of personal pronouns ('you' and 'we' in Swedish). The plural 'we' suggests that it is not only Robban's narrative we hear, but that of Finnish-Swedes, in general, too. Again, Pyhimys voices Robban through a mix of spoken vernacular Finnish and Swedish. This mixture, and also Swedish on its own, clearly index Robban's Finnish-Swedishness.

4.

kyl mä näen miten ne yytsii  
et jos mul ois 99 problemer  
niin raha ei ois yks niist

I can see how they're *staring*  
like if I had 99 problems  
money wouldn't be one of them

In example 4, the resources Pyhimys makes use of operate on local and translocal scale-levels. In the story we can see how, like the majority of Finns, even the local winos ('they') stereotypically assume that money is no problem for Robban. The example also includes a cultural reference to a rap song entitled "99 problems" by a famous American rap artist, Jay-Z. This is yet another instance of re-textualization since the meaning of this cultural reference is translocal but it is also localized into Robban's life and the Finnish-Swedish context: both the winos and Robban are local characters. In addition, its meaning is subcultural in the sense that only those who are familiar with American rap music, and Jay-Z, in particular, are really able to identify this intertextual element in Pyhimys' song. Linguistically, the extract is once more a mixture: it contains Helsinki slang ('yytsii' – 'stares'), spoken vernacular Finnish and Swedish. The Swedish '99 problemer' (pro: '99 problem') is, furthermore, an ungrammatical expression, indicating perhaps the artist's non-nativeness as a user of Swedish. Also Pyhimys confirmed this as he noted: "I don't have Finnish-Swedish roots and I am not at all sure whether the cultural references are accurate. However, that's not what's important, but rather that the listener identifies with Robban's view on the world that's shaped by one's own reference group." In this comment, Pyhimys is locating his song on both the local and national scales. The local scale consists of Robban's 'minority' viewpoint and the reference group, whereas the national scale consists of the cultural references in the lyrics. In Pyhimys' comment, we can see a clear distinction between his outsider's viewpoint and that of Robban, an insider. However, the song is made from the point of view of and in the defense of the minority.

5.

Kansanlauluissa aina sama teema  
oma kulttuuriperimä korkeimpana ihanteena  
jos ei yhteen sulauduta, jää vaan Adam och Eva,  
låt mig leva

Folk songs always have the same theme  
our own cultural heritage as the highest ideal  
if we won't assimilate, only Adam and Eve will be left,  
let me live

The two first lines of example 5 operate on a purely national scale-level. In them, we can hear an authoritative historical voice, the formal voice of education, which, linguistically and discursively, imitates a textbook-like style. This voice is done with the help of an official resource – standard Finnish. Content-wise, what is said in the standard, textbook-ish style, implies protectionism: how we should preserve and protect our own cultural heritage. Through this kind of re-entextualization, Pyhimys makes an ironic comment on the nationalistic and protectionist official cultural ideology. On the third and fourth line of the extract, we can see the local, national and global scale-levels again combine and mix. On the global scale, we can see a sociocultural reference to the Bible and the paradise in which only Adam and Eve are left, with no chance of reproduction. On the national scale, this example implies a situation in which, in order to survive, the minority cannot live on its own and separate from the rest of the world, but has to blend in with the others, the Finnish-speaking majority. The characters of the Bible are referred to in Swedish, which further indexes the minority of Swedish-speaking Finns in the context of this song. The Swedish sentence “Låt mig leva” (‘Let me live’) can be seen as referring, on the local scale-level, to Robban’s wish to live his private life as a Swedish-speaking young man.

6.

**Shout-outs** till alla mina vänner från Västra Nyland till **all the way to the** Östra Nyland!

**Shout-outs** to all of my friends from Western Nyland to **all the way to the** Eastern Nyland!

The last line, the coda, of the song is particularly complex. In this example, Pyhimys operates on several scales: the local, regional, global and translocal. These scales overlap and intertwine with each other. Firstly, the cultural reference ‘shout-outs’ is a subcultural hip hop greeting. It is a typical name-dropping practice for expressing kudos, respect, to one’s friends and acquaintances, particularly at the end of a text or a song. This greeting, as it is expressed in English, also functions on the global scale, at least for hip hop enthusiasts. However, ‘shout-outs’ can also be simultaneously seen as functional on the translocal scale. The fact that a Finnish-Swedish Robban makes use of this English expression is meaningful and understandable both locally and globally. Through it, he identifies both with his own and global (hip hop) culture. Secondly, example 6 includes a subcultural reference to ‘East versus West’. Stereotypically in hip hop culture, the East coast or side and the West coast or side are always stereotypically set against each other, as if they were automatically each other’s rivalries and enemies. This image is also often strongly created and emphasized by the media. The most (in)famous example of this dichotomy is the long-term hatred between a Californian rapper Tupac Shakur and a New York rapper Notorious B.I.G.. Both of them got violently killed in the confrontations between the East and West coast in the mid-1990s. (Price 2006, 51–52.) In example 6, however, Pyhimys does away with the dichotomy by extending his greetings both to the West and to the East. The local scale can be seen in that his shout-outs are also to his local friends and he addresses them with resources both from Swedish and English. His repertoire, thus, includes both local and global resources for his own local use. Thus, we can expect these resources to be part of his friends’ repertoires, as well. In this example, there is also a specific regional place reference to Nyland, the southern-most province of Finland, which localizes Robban and his friends to a specific geographical area.

## **5. In conclusion: Finnish rap music as a complex scalar hybrid**

The Swedish language can be seen as an ‘old’ resource in Finnish society, whereas English is fairly ‘new’. Swedish originates from the several hundred years of Swedish rule in Finland. English, on the other hand, has gained foothold in Finnish society, in education and through media, only since the Second World War (Leppänen 2007). Globalization processes have, during the 21<sup>st</sup> century, made this resource more and more important. Often the most important resource is the non-standard spoken vernacular that the youth, in particular, make use of in their free time, in their hobbies and subcultural groups (see Leppänen & Nikula 2007). As part of this more general process of change, the so-called hip hop English, African American Vernacular English, is also spreading across the globe through popular culture and hip hop culture. Young people make use of this resource either in its original form or appropriate and modify it in the context of their mother tongue. Their linguistic resources are often also mixed in nature, and, at times, it is unclear, where, for them, one ‘language’ ends and another begins. This kind of heterogeneous language use is often motivated by identity work: with it, the youth can show their membership in a particular subculture or group and their expertise of particular discourses.

In the analysis of one Finnish rap piece, I have shown how a critical sociolinguistic account is constructed both on the discursive and linguistic levels and how these two levels are always intricately connected and intertwined. An indexical, sometimes even iconic, relationship seems to exist between these two levels. On several instances, Pyhimys is amplifying the indexical meaning of the discursive resources (narrative, topics, discourses, speech act patterns and cultural references) by how he says it, i.e., through Swedish, spoken vernacular Finnish, standard Finnish, English or a mixture of some or all of these resources. The meanings he wishes to convey become reinforced when, for example, an official, textbook-like voice and discourse is expressed in standard Finnish. Spoken vernacular Finnish could not be used for a similar effect and impression.

In these examples, we saw both unexpected but also planned use, juxtaposition and mixing of various resources. For example, the use of Swedish can be seen as partly unexpected. This is because, although Swedish is the second official language of the country, and Pyhimys lives in Helsinki, where Swedish is used and heard much more frequently than for example in Central Finland, Swedish is still a relatively uncommon resource in Finnish rap music, particularly at the extent with which it is used in Bättre folk. On the other hand, the use of Swedish seems deliberate: the whole idea of the song is to bring forward the voice and experiences of a minority representative, a Finnish-Swedish Robban. In this case, the use of Swedish is thus very much justified. By making use of these particular resources, the rapper creates an ironic and reversal picture of the traditional division between the Swedish-speaking Finns and Finnish-speaking Finns. Through these resources, Pyhimys orients to the still relatively delicate issues of social class, power and majority-minority sensitivities. All of these discursive and linguistic resources operate on several different scale-levels that blend into, mix, and/or are opposite to each other. The conflict can be seen, for example, in that the lyrics ‘demand’ that the historical scale of Sweden-Finland, or at least the divide between the two peoples that is transmitted from this period, should be forgotten. Now, here and in this specific moment, what matters is the local, contemporary scale in which people are, at least in principle, equal and no one should be judged based on one’s own prejudice and stereotypes. In connection to the song and its message, we can also ponder on Pyhimys being in such a position in the Finnish hip hop scene and having such authority and power that he can, through his songs, in a way, educate and ‘enlighten’ the youth. His political message, if one can call it that, seems to encompass the equality of both people and languages. The inclusion of Swedish language in the song can be seen as a sign of this.

Previous research on hip hop cultures across the globe (e.g. Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2002), has suggested that hip hop culture is, in fact, a local appropriation and re-contextualization of a global cultural model. However, hip hop culture can also simultaneously be seen as a continuation of the old, (already) local story-telling traditions that connects to several worlds (Pennycook & Mitchell 2009). This dual process can be seen, for example, in the language choices, as well as in topics, narratives and cultural references rappers relate in their lyrics. My study, however, shows that hip hop is also always and inevitably a blend of different scales and rap artists operate on these different scale-levels and, in the process, occupy different positions, voices as well as mobilize various resources in their lyrics. The scales should not, thus, be seen (only) as a dichotomy between the local and the global – rather, the scales are inseparable and very much interwoven: they mix and blend in a variety of ways. The new kinds of discourses that are produced through these scales are very complex and heterogeneous, and very typical for the contemporary globalization processes.

## References

- Alim, H. Samy, Awad Ibrahim & Alastair Pennycook (eds) (2009) *Global linguistic flows. Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*. New York: Routledge.
- Alim, H. Samy (2009) Introduction. In: H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim & Alastair Pennycook (eds) *Global linguistic flows. Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*. New York: Routledge, 1–22.
- Androutsopoulos, Jannis (2009) Language and the Three Spheres of Hip Hop. In: H. Samy Alim & Awad Ibrahim & Alastair Pennycook (eds) *Global linguistic flows. Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*. New York: Routledge, 43–62.
- Androutsopoulos, Jannis & Arno Scholz (2002) On the recontextualization of hip-hop in European speech communities: a contrastive analysis of rap lyrics [online]. *PhiN* 19, 1–42. <http://web.fu-berlin.de/phn>.
- Androutsopoulos, Jannis & Arno Scholz (2003) Spaghetti Funk: Appropriations of Hip-Hop Culture and Rap Music in Europe. *Popular Music and Society* 26 (4), 463–479.
- Bakhtin, Mihail (1981) Discourse in the Novel. In: Michael Holquist (ed.) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 259–422.
- Blommaert, Jan (2005) *Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blommaert, Jan (2010) *The sociolinguistics of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blommaert, Jan & Ben Rampton (Forthcoming) Language and superdiversity. *Diversities*.
- Goffman, Erving (1981) *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Grönlund, Kimmo (2011) Introduktion – finlandssvenskar i publikdemokrati [‘Introduction – Finland-Swedes in public democracy’]. In: Kimmo Grönlund (ed.) *Språk och politisk mobilisering. Finlandssvenskar i publikdemokrati* [‘Language and political mobilization. Finland-Swedes in public democracy’]. Helsinki: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 7–13.
- Hakulinen, Auli, Jyrki Kalliokoski, Salli Kankaanpää, Antti Kanner, Kimmo Koskeniemi, Lea Laitine, Sari Maamies & Pirkko Nuolijärvi (2009) *Suomen kielen tulevaisuus. Kielipoliittinen toimintaohjelma* [‘The future of Finnish language: Language political plan of action’]. Helsinki: Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskus.
- Hymes, Dell (1996) *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Toward an Understanding of Voice*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Johnstone, Barbara (2002) *Discourse Analysis*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Kalliokoski, Jyrki (2006) "Omaa panosta omasta vokabulaaristosta." Rap-tekstit Stadin slangin kuvina [""Our own contribution from our own vocabulary." Rap texts as images of Stadi slang']. In: Kaisu Juusela & Katariina Nisula (eds) *Helsinki kieliyhteisönä* ['Helsinki as a language community']. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 299–317.

Leppänen Sirpa (2007) Youth language in media contexts: insights into the functions of English in Finland. *World Englishes* 26 (2), 149–169.

Leppänen, Sirpa (Forthcoming) Linguistic and Discursive Heteroglossia on the Translocal Internet: The Case of Web Writing. In: Mark Sebba & Shahrzad Mahootian & Carla Jonsson (eds) *Language mixing and code-switching in writing: Approaches to mixed-language written discourse*. London: Routledge.

Leppänen, Sirpa & Tarja Nikula (2007) Diverse uses of English in Finnish society: Discourse-pragmatic insights into media, educational and business contexts. *Multilingua* 26 (4), 333–380.

Leppänen, Sirpa, Anne Pitkänen-Huhta, Arja Piirainen-Marsh, Tarja Nikula & Saija Peuronen (2009a) Young people's translocal new media uses: a multiperspective analysis of language choice and heteroglossia. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14 (4), 1080–1107.

Leppänen, Sirpa, Anne Pitkänen-Huhta, Tarja Nikula, Samu Kytölä, Timo Törmäkangas, Kari Nissinen, Leila Kääntä, Tiina Räisänen, Mikko Laitinen, Päivi Pahta, Heidi Koskela, Salla Lähdesmäki & Henna Jousmäki (2011) *National Survey on the English Language in Finland: Uses, Meanings and Functions*. Studies in Variation, Contacts and Change in English, vol 5. Helsinki: Research Unit for Variation, Contacts and Change in English. <http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/journal/volumes/05/index.html>

Leppänen, Sirpa & Sari Pietikäinen (2010) Urban Rap goes to Arctic Lapland: Breaking Through and Saving the Endangered Inari Sámi Language. In: Helen Kelly-Holmes & Gerlinde Mautner (eds) *Language and the Market*. London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 148–158.

Mikkonen, Jani (2004) *Riimi riimistä. Suomalaisen hiphopmusiikin nousu ja uho* ['A rhyme for rhyme. The rise and boast of Finnish hip hop music']. Helsinki: Otava.

Morgan, Marcyliena (2002) *Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Omoniyi, Tope (2009) "So I choose to Do Am Naija Style" – Hip Hop, Language, and the Postcolonial Identities. In: H. Samy Alim & Awad Ibrahim & Alastair Pennycook (eds) *Global linguistic flows. Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*. New York: Routledge, 113–135.

Pennycook, Alastair (2007) *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows*. London: Routledge.

Pennycook, Alastair & Tony Mitchell (2009) Hip Hop as Dusty Foot Philosophy. Engaging Locality. In: H. Samy Alim & Awad Ibrahim & Alastair Pennycook (eds) *Global linguistic flows. Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*. New York: Routledge, 25–42.



Perussuomalaiset ['Basic Finns'] (2011) Vaaliohjelma ['Election program'].  
<http://www.fsd.uta.fi/vaalimaatti/vaalit2011/ohjelma?tunniste=psvaaliohjelma2011>  
(Accessed 27.5.2011.)

Price, Emmet G. (2006) *Hip Hop Culture*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

Ruotsalainen kansanpuolue ['Swedish People's Party'] (2011) Vaaliohjelma ['Election program'].  
<http://www.fsd.uta.fi/vaalimaatti/vaalit2011/ohjelma?tunniste=sfpvaaliohjelma2011>  
(Accessed 27.5.2011)

Silverstein, Michael & Greg Urban (1996) The natural history of discourse. In: Michael Silverstein & Greg Urban (eds) *Natural histories of discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1-22.

Suomen perustuslaki ['Constitution of Finland'] (1999) 731.  
<http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1999/19990731>  
(Accessed 27.5.2011)

Tandefelt, Marika (2000) *Ett land, två språk: den finländska modellen* ['One country, two languages: the Finnish model']. Espoo: Schildt.

Westinen, Elina (2007) "*Buuzzia, budia ja hyvää ghettobootya*" [Booze, ganja and good ghetto booty]. *The construction of hip hop identities in Finnish rap lyrics through English and language mixing* [online]. Unpublished Master's thesis. Department of Languages, University of Jyväskylä.  
[http://thesis.jyu.fi/08/URN\\_NBN\\_fi\\_jyu-200801251100.pdf](http://thesis.jyu.fi/08/URN_NBN_fi_jyu-200801251100.pdf). (Accessed 27.5.2011)

Westinen, Elina (2010) The Linguistic and Discursive Construction of Hip Hop Identities: A View on Finnish Rap Lyrics. In: Minna Palander-Collin & Hartmut Lenk & Minna Nevala & Päivi Sihvonen & Marjo Vesalainen (eds) *Constructing Identity in Interpersonal Communication*. Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 251-262.

Westinen, Elina (Forthcoming) Bättre folk – kriittinen sosiolingvistinen kommentti suomalaisessa rap-musiikissa ['Better people – critical sociolinguistic commentary in Finnish rap music']. In Mikko Salasuo, Pauli Komonen & Janne Poikolainen (eds), *Katukulttuurit*. ['Street cultures'] Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusverkosto.

## Hejsan

### Jag är kallas Robban

mul on Volvo, takaluukussa koppa  
kessuu halv toppa  
jag kan inte stoppa

mul on autossa aina sama CD,  
Lasse Melbergs första EP  
mut en äänestä RKP:T,  
jag är ingen cliché, en säästä huvi-veneeseen  
Lainaa satanen,  
Jag kan inte ringa min folks, jag hatar dem  
lukeeks mun otsassa pappa betalar  
ku toivomus kaivost taas kolikkoja naaraan  
min credit är slut  
mut mä en huolestuta ihmisii niinku noi muut  
kai se riippuu mist sä tuut,  
ja miltä näytät, Uffist *kledjut*, men ser bra ut  
mun aina uskotaan selviävän,  
selviithän? Nej, En selvinpäin  
mitä sä koet syrjinnän merkitsevän  
koska mä koen sen myös toisinpäin

### Bättre Folk, Bättre Folk

Tää ei oo paremmille ihmisille  
tää on vaan parempaa musaa  
Bättre Folk, Bättre Folk  
Tää ei oo paremmille ihmisille  
tää on vaan paremman laatuinen **folk**

### 1323 sai Österland itärajan

Muttei menny Jussi suosiolla taakse vajan  
ja vuosisatojen ajan  
ni var orjat, vi var borgare  
mut miten mun pitäis korjaa se  
kaikki ristiin tääl paneksii  
mut ei pulsarit pummi mult euroo,  
vaan Amexii  
kyl mä näen miten ne *yytsii*  
et jos mul ois 99 problemer  
niin raha ei ois yks niist  
Kansanlauluissa aina sama teema  
oma kulttuuriperimä korkeimpana ihanteena  
jos ei yhteen sulauduta, jää vaan Adam och Eva,  
låt mig leva  
erityiskohtelu en halua vaik sais  
Jos vaiks menneet kokonaan unohdettais  
ei kai kukaan tästä ääneen valittais  
mut kaikki olis pelkureita jos ne uskaltais

**Shout-outs** till alla mina vänner från Västra Nyland till  
**all the way to the** Östra Nyland!

## Hello

### My name is Robban

I've got a Volvo, a crate of beer in the trunk  
half a pack of smokes  
I can't stop

I've always got the same CD in my car,  
Lasse Melberg's first EP  
but I don't vote for SPP,  
I'm no cliché, I'm not saving for a yacht  
Borrow me a hundred,  
I can't call my folks, I hate them  
does my forehead say daddy pays  
when I'm picking up coins from the wishing well again  
I'm out of credit  
but I don't worry other people like those other people do  
I guess it depends where you come from,  
and how you appear, *clothes* from Uff, but it looks good  
they always think that I'll be fine,  
will I? No, not sober  
what do you think discrimination means  
cos I experience it also the other way around

### Better folk, Better folk

This isn't for better people  
this is just better music  
Better folk, Better folk,  
This isn't for better people  
this is just **folk** of better quality

### in 1323 Österland got its Eastern boarder

but the Finnish man fought back  
and for centuries  
you were slaves, we were bourgeois  
but how am I supposed to fix it  
everyone's just fucking each other here  
the winos aren't begging a euro from me,  
but Amex  
I can see how they're *staring*  
like if I had 99 problems  
money wouldn't be one of them  
Folk songs always have the same theme  
our own cultural heritage as the highest ideal  
if we won't assimilate, only Adam and Eve will be left,  
let me live  
I don't want any special treatment, even if I could get it  
What if we just forgot all about the past,  
no one would complain about this out loud,  
but everyone would be a coward, if they dared

**Shout-outs** to all of my friends from Western Nyland to  
**all the way to the** Eastern Nyland!